

Testimony of Patrick Sheehan-Gaumer, Case Manager/Group Facilitator
Fatherhood Initiative Program
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Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Midterm Budget Adjustments

Please, do not support Governor Malloy's plan to eliminate Family Empowerment and Family School Connection Programs. My name is Patrick Sheehan-Gaumer, Case Manager/Group Facilitator, at Madonna Place, Inc. a family support agency in Norwich. The desired result of our services is that children in New London County will develop in safe and nurturing families.

The dads who walk into our office are older dads. They are usually not under 23. They often have addiction issues, many have felony convictions, many are unemployed. They cannot get help from the Family Empowerment Program. But, they used to be young dads. Now they are 30 year olds who have 10 year old sons or daughters that they don't know. They are men coming to us with referrals from DCF or Probation or from half-way houses funded by the state. But they used to be young dads. And they didn't get help when they needed it.

The Family Empowerment Program provides what these men needed when they were young dads. Prevention, early intervention. These are not phrases that young parents usually relate to. They understand 'help'. And that's what we are able to do. Help. With the funds from FEP, we are able to do outreach to the young fathers who don't realize that they need the help yet. Men are trained not to ask for help. We are trained from a very young age not to show weakness, and asking for help is admitting weakness. The outreach we do to young fathers helps get rid of the stigma. It allows us to take the staff time to do outreach to prenatal care at hospitals. It allows us to do outreach to the schools.

We are unique in that we are able to approach dads through the hospitals (with help from the FEP). Many young fathers never had father figures in their lives. We are the teachers. We help men learn how to be better fathers. We use the curriculum "Doctor Dad" from the National Fatherhood Initiative. This program works in a preventative manner to teach young fathers how to care for and nurture their new born children. This curriculum covers how to care for a sick, injured, and healthy child as well as how to ensure a safe home for an infant. This course also has a component on the prevention of shaken baby syndrome.

I facilitate the Dr. Dad program, which we run at Backus Hospital, and I love it. I see how much it helps these young fathers to be able to ask for advice in a safe environment. As I said earlier, the young fathers don't come to us, we have to find them and pull them in. Once we get them in the door, they are often the most engaged dad in the room. They are the ones asking if they swaddle the practice doll right. They are the ones asking the other dads for advice on how to

better support their pregnant partners. The key is getting them in the door, and that's where the continued support for the Family Empowerment Program comes in.

The money allows us to do outreach to young dads. Most fathers who ask for help are older and the problems have already negatively affected their kids. This money allows us to do outreach to young fathers and help them be better engaged with their kids at a young age. This money not only helps them learn parenting skills, it conducts case management to help fathers establish paternity, custody orders, co-parenting plans, and financial support agreements. The majority of young fathers are enrolled in both educational groups and case management services.

If you cut this funding now we are still going to be seeing these dads, just not for another 10 years. We will be seeing them after the damage has already been done. Don't cut the funds. Don't cut these programs. Give Connecticut families the supports they need for our kids to succeed.

Madonna Place, Inc.-Family Empowerment Program highlights include (2008 – 2011)
include:

- Over 200 young fathers (under 23 years) served over the last six years
- Nearly 80% completion rate among all enrolled
- Majority of graduates increased knowledge of parental skills and increased confidence in using those skills
- Majority of graduates are knowledgeable on ways to sooth a crying baby
- Fathers report enjoying the class and majority report appreciation and satisfaction with services
- Nearly 30 dads used the services to establish paternity and/or custody orders